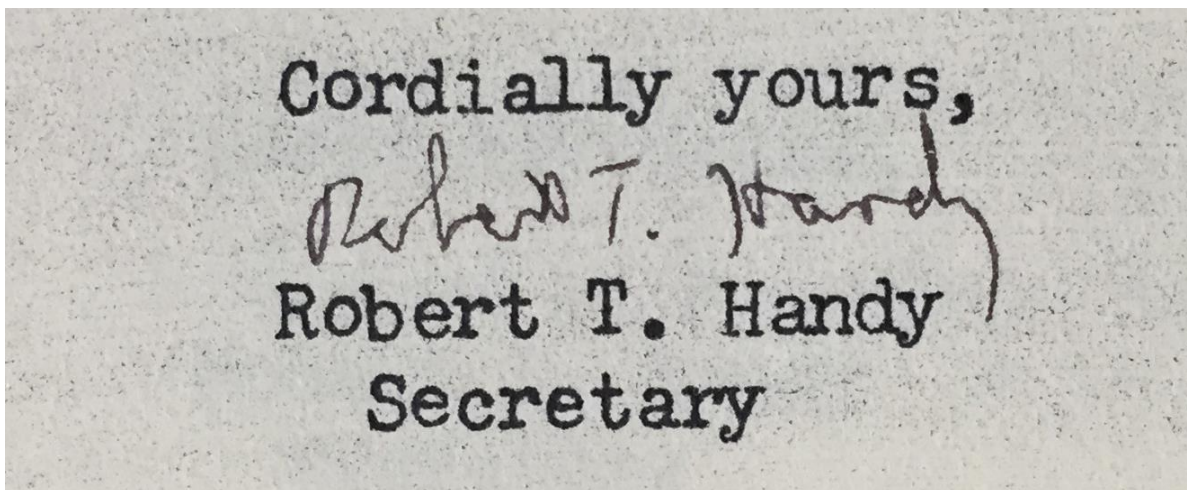


The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,
Union Theological Seminary, New York

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

Robert T. Handy Papers, 1932 – 1986



Credit to: Robert T. Handy Papers, Series 2B, Box 1, Folder 1,
The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Finding Aid prepared by Daniel Sokolow, Aug. 1996 and Ruth Tonkiss Cameron, Oct. 2007
Reviewed and Updated by Brigette C. Kamsler, March 2015 with financial support from the
Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: Robert T. Handy, 1918-2009
Title: Robert T. Handy Papers
Inclusive dates: 1932-1986
Bulk dates: 1935-1963
Abstract: UTS Professor of Church History and Academic Dean, Adjunct Columbia University Religion Department faculty member, published history of UTS in 1987, Secretary of Fellowship of Socialist Christians/Frontier Fellowship/Christian Action. Collection contains draft manuscript of UTS history; correspondence and administrative records of FSC and CA.
Size: 7 boxes, 3.00 linear feet
Storage: **Offsite storage**
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu

Administrative Information

- Provenance: The papers were donated by Robert T. Handy to the Burke Library in 1996.
- Access: Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible
Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions: The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying. Researchers can access published versions of Handy's "History of UTS." The typescript is located in series 1. Please note that boxes are held in Offsite storage and will require 48 hours' notice in response to a weekday request for retrieval.
- Preferred Citation: Item description, UTS: Robert T. Handy Papers, series #, box #, folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Robert T. Handy was born January 30, 1918 in Rockville, Connecticut and educated at Brown University, where he received an A.B. in 1940, Colgate Rochester Divinity School (M. Div in 1943), and the University of Chicago (PhD in 1949). Handy was ordained as a pastor in 1943, and served as a pastor and army chaplain.

He served as professor of church history at Union Theological Seminary from 1950 to 1986, when he retired from his position as Henry Sloane Coffin professor of Church History. In addition to his teaching duties, Handy also served for a time as the Seminary's academic dean and as adjunct professor of Religion at Columbia University from 1973-1986.

Handy wrote and edited numerous volumes on American religious history, including the most recent history of Union Theological Seminary in 1987. This book brought the history of the institution up to date, as a previous volume published by Henry Sloane Coffin ended in 1945. Handy's work served the additional purpose of providing insight into the lives of faculty and students outside of their work with the Seminary.

Among the outside interests of the faculty was the Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC), the brainchild of Handy's UTS colleague Reinhold Niebuhr, who formed the organization in the early 1930's. The FSC would later evolve into Christian Action, with Robert Handy serving as Secretary.

Robert Handy died in January 2009 at the age of 90. He is remembered for being an impressive scholar of American church history, an exceptional teacher, and a gifted administrator.

Sources:

Letter from Robert T. Handy, December 1996.

Stone, Ronald H. *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century*. Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection is organized in two series. The collection is organized alphabetically unless otherwise noted.

- **Series 1: History of Union Theological Seminary, 1986 (1 box, 0.50 lin. ft.)**

This series contains a typescript of Handy's *History of Union Theological Seminary*. The copy appears to be one from late in the editing process. Arrangement is by chapter.

Handy's tenure at Union as a member of both the faculty and the administration gave him particular insight into the critical issues affecting the Seminary during his time. Handy also successfully illuminated the events of other eras of Union's past, such as the Briggs and McGiffert trials around the turn of the twentieth century. Handy's exhaustive research in the UTS archives provided the basis for a readable and entertaining history that built on the work of earlier scholars of the Seminary's history, including the volumes by former UTS president Henry Sloane Coffin and faculty members G.L. Prentiss and Charles R. Gillett.

- **Series 2: Organizations, 1932-1963 (6 boxes, 2.50 lin. ft.)**

This series contains information on organizations that Handy was involved. One of the outside interests of the UTS faculty was the Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC), the brainchild of Handy's UTS colleague Reinhold Niebuhr, who formed the organization in the early 1930's. Niebuhr was committed to socialist ideas at this point in his life, and he created the FSC to unite like-minded Christians in an association that would both promote and practice socialist philosophies and, more importantly, socialist economics. FSC's critical argument was that private ownership of major properties had to be replaced by social ownership. The group also argued that capitalist ideals were at odds with Christian ethics. While FSC specifically disassociated itself from Marxism, the group did recognize its debt to Marx and his economic ideas.

The ideas of FSC were also put in practice by its members; they were to contribute all excess money (anything over \$8,000) to causes supported by the FSC, and to join other organizations, such as labor unions, which promoted socialist causes. All actions taken by FSC members were to be nonviolent, but they were to contribute time and effort to the cause. In addition to Niebuhr, the FSC attracted the efforts of Paul Tillich, John C. Bennett, and Joseph Fletcher. Niebuhr and Tillich particularly used the organization as a means of expressing their theology as well as their activism, and they played a major role in the development of the group's philosophy.

At its height in the late 1940's, the group had some 1,200 members. They helped in the fight against the McCarthyism of the 1950's, as well as separating more clearly the Christian social action movement from Marxism. The group changed names twice over its life, from FSC to the Frontier Fellowship in the 1940's, and eventually into Christian Action, with Robert Handy serving as Secretary. Reinhold Niebuhr's stroke in 1952

effectively ended his involvement with the organization, and with his departure the group faded slowly. They remained active until 1956, when the group folded.

- **Subseries 2A: Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC), 1932-1951 (2 boxes, 1.00 lin. ft.)**

Within this subseries are primarily of correspondence from the organization. Also included are some administrative documents such as minutes and reports, as well as several files on the Frontier Fellowship, which seems to have been either a later incarnation of the FSC, or an offshoot.

The FSC materials were not directly produced by Handy. The FSC files were simply passed on or held over to the Christian Action administration and passed to Handy as Secretary of Christian Action.

- **Subseries 2B: Christian Action (CA), 1951-1963 (4 boxes, 1.50 lin. ft.)**

This subseries includes mainly correspondence from Christian Action, which was a later incarnation of the FSC. Also included are administrative materials and files specific to the New York Chapter. Correspondence is organized alphabetically by last name. Some folders are entirely devoted to specific individuals, such as box 2, folder 3 which is all William Kirk correspondence.

Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. Any items in an advanced state of deterioration were placed in Mylar envelopes.

The collection was originally processed by Daniel Sokolow soon after it was donated to the Library by Handy himself. In 2015, the collection was placed in new acid-free boxes and folders as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant. It was at this time that Series 2 was created; originally, the Christian Action section and the Fellowship of Socialist Christians were two separate series; now they are subseries of a larger group.

Further Sources

Robert Handy's book, *The History of Union Theological Seminary in New York*, was published in 1987 by Columbia University Press. It is widely available; for more information, please see: <http://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/4491373>. Columbia University and other libraries offer a number of other writings and publications by Handy, which can be found by searching Columbia's library catalog, [CLIO](#).

The Burke Library offers a number of other collections related to Christian Action. These collections and more can be found by searching the [Burke Library Archives website](#).

Contents list

Series 1: History of Union Theological Seminary, 1986

Series Box Folder Contents

1	1	1-11	Manuscript, Chapters 1-10 and Notes, 1986
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Series 2: Organizations, 1932-1963

Subseries 2A: Fellowship of Socialist Christians, 1932-1951

2A	1	1-9	Correspondence A-R, 1932-1936
2A	2	1-4	Correspondence S-Y, 1932-1936
2A	2	5	Correspondence: Form Letters, 1933-1936
2A	2	6	Administration: Lists [193?]
2A	2	7	Administration: Minutes, 1933-1935
2A	2	8	Published Materials, 1935-1936
2A	2	9	Principles and other Administrative Documents [193?]
2A	2	10	Frontier Fellowship: Correspondence, 1948-1951
2A	2	11	Frontier Fellowship: Administration, 1948-1951

Subseries 2B: Christian Action, 1951-1963

2B	1	1	Administration, 1951-Jun 1953
2B	1	2	Administration, Jul - Dec 1953
2B	1	3	Administration, Jan- Oct 1954
2B	1	4	Administration, Nov 1954-1955
2B	1	5	Conference, Newsletters and Publicity, 1951 -1955
2B	1	6-7	Correspondence: A-G, 1951-1955
2B	2	1-7	Correspondence: H-So, 1951-1955
2B	3	1-3	Correspondence: Sp-Z, 1951-1955
2B	3	4	Correspondence: Unidentified and Form Letters, 1951-1955
2B	4	1-4	New York Chapter Minutes, Reports, Administrative Information and Clippings, 1952-1963